

THE JOURNAL OF
Egyptian
Archaeology

VOLUME 97
2011

PUBLISHED BY
THE EGYPT EXPLORATION SOCIETY
3 DOUGHTY MEWS, LONDON WC1N 2PG
ISSN 0307-5133

The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology

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ISSN 0307-5133

website: <http://www.ees.ac.uk/publications/journal-egyptian-archaeology.html>

Published annually by

The Egypt Exploration Society

3 Doughty Mews

London WC1N 2PG

Registered Charity No. 212384

A limited Company registered in England, No. 25816

Printed in Great Britain by

Commercial Colour Press Plc

Angard House, 185 Forest Road

Hainault

Essex IG6 3HX

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BRIEF COMMUNICATIONS

Inlaid eyes on Old Kingdom coffins: a history of misidentification

Certain stone objects found in association with a number of Old Kingdom coffins have been wrongly identified in the past as model grooming implements or amulets. These objects are in fact inlaid *udjat*-eyes, and often form the sole evidence for this type of treatment, which is rare during the Old Kingdom.

It has recently been claimed that the oldest, and so far only known, set of model grooming implements from the Old Kingdom had been found in shaft 'A' in the tomb of Inti at South Abū Šīr.¹ The author describes several objects of serpentinite that individually exhibit unfamiliar forms, and she tries to connect them with actual grooming implements that are known from archaeological contexts. A pair of tweezers, two cosmetic spoons or spatulas, and two razors or hair curlers are thus identified.

However, none of these interpretations are correct. The objects concerned are the individual elements of a pair of inlaid *udjat*-eyes, which are sometimes encountered on the exterior of Old Kingdom box coffins. The location in which these objects were found in the tomb at Abū Šīr provides a valuable clue. All the items were recovered on the bottom of a limestone sarcophagus, in the northern part. Vlčková speculates that they may originally have been placed inside the wooden coffin that once rested inside the limestone sarcophagus. The wooden coffin was indeed the carrier for these objects, but they were not placed inside it. Rather they were inlaid on the eastern side panel, near the head end of the coffin.

At Dayr al-Barshā, an almost identical pair of inlaid *udjat*-eyes was found in the northern part of a plundered burial chamber (16H50/1B) in the late Old Kingdom tomb of Uky (fig. 1).² The sclerae of the eyes are made of limestone, while the pupils are of obsidian. All the other elements belonging to the *udjat*-eyes are made of greywacke. The greywacke elements have a flat back, but a slightly convex surface, just like the elements found at Abū Šīr. Ironically, the only element missing in the Dayr al-Barshā set is one of the postocular stripes, which is also the element missing in the Abū Šīr set.

Individual elements of inlaid *udjat*-eyes can be difficult to recognise when not found in their original context. A similar error has been made in the publication of tomb 161 at Tall Bastā. The excavator describes a set of slate objects found in a late Old Kingdom tomb as 'two ostrich feathers, two amulets, and two broken amulets in the form of fingers (?)'.³ However, since a pair of inlaid eyes, encased in a copper frame, and two slate eyebrows were found along with them,⁴ there is no doubt that these 'amulets' are in fact also individual elements of a pair of inlaid *udjat*-eyes.

¹ P. Vlčková, "Great Beard has Shaved this Pepy's Head and Sothis has Washed this Pepy's Arm...": The Earliest Attestation of "Grooming Model Implements" from the Old Kingdom', in M. Bárta, F. Coppens, and J. Krejčí (eds), *Abusir and Saqqara in the Year 2005: Proceedings of the Conference Held in Prague, June 27–July 5, 2005* (Prague, 2006), 385–96.

² M. De Meyer, *Old Kingdom Rock Tombs at Dayr al-Barshā: Archaeological and Textual Evidence of their Use and Reuse in Zones 4 and 7* (PhD thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; Leuven, 2008), 582–5.

³ A. El-Sawi, *Excavations at Tell Basta: Report of Seasons 1967–1971 and Catalogue of Finds* (Prague, 1979), 72–3 (Burial nr. 161, Reg. No. 1894–1896), pls 148, 151. The misidentification was later taken over in W. Grajetzki, *Burial Customs in Ancient Egypt: Life in Death For Rich and Poor* (London, 2003), fig. 33.

⁴ El-Sawi, *Excavations at Tell Basta*, 73 (Reg. No. 1893) and pl. 150.



FIG. 1. Pair of inlaid *udjat*-eyes from the burial chamber of shaft 16H50/1B in the tomb of Uky at Dayr al-Barshā.

The reason behind these misinterpretations may simply be that one does not expect inlaid eyes in Old Kingdom coffins. *Udjat*-eyes in general only start to appear on coffins in the course of the Sixth Dynasty, and they are mostly painted on.⁵ While inlaid *udjat*-eyes are well attested during the Middle Kingdom,⁶ they are not a very common feature during the Old Kingdom. So far only six instances are known to the author, which include the eyes from Dayr al-Barshā, Tall Bastā, and Abū Šīr described above. Of the other three, the best preserved set was found in 1927 by Varille in the tomb of Ni-Ankh-Pepi at Zāwiyyat al-Mayyitīn.⁷ This set is complete, but the wooden coffin in which the elements once fitted had also completely decayed. The sclerae are made of crystalline limestone and were set in copper, while the pupils are of obsidian. No details are provided regarding the stone used for the other elements.

At Abydos, the sarcophagus of Nekhty/Idi contains a pair of inlaid eyes on the interior rather than on the exterior of the coffin as is usual.⁸ This sarcophagus is also made in limestone, setting it apart from the other Old Kingdom examples given here. At Giza one of

⁵ A. M. Donadoni Roveri, *I sarcofagi egizi dalle origini alla fine dell'antico regno* (Università di Roma, Istituto di studi del Vicino Oriente, Serie archeologica 16; Rome, 1969), 89–90, pl. 38.1; G. Lapp, *Typologie der Särge und Sargkammern von der 6. bis 13. Dynastie* (SAGA 7; Heidelberg, 1993), 32.

⁶ See for instance the inner and outer coffins of Mesehti from Asyūt, S1C and S2C: R. Hannig, *Zur Paläographie der Särge aus Assiut* (HÄB 47; Hildesheim, 2006), 439, 442; see also the inner and outer coffins of Amenemhat from Dayr al-Barshā, B9C and B10C: Lapp, *Typologie der Särge und Sargkammern*, pl. 13b (B1b = B9C); S. Ikram and A. M. Dodson, *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt: Equipping the Dead For Eternity* (Cairo, 1998), fig. 264; see also the outer and middle coffins of Senebtisi from Lisht, L4 and L5: A. C. Mace and H. E. Winlock, *The Tomb of Senebtisi at Lisht* (PMMA 1; New York, 1916), 23 and figs 9, 10 (outer coffin), 30 and pl. 17 (inner coffin). For more examples of inlaid eyes of this type, see A. Lucas, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries* (4th edn, revised and enlarged by J. R. Harris; London, 1962), 107–17. In a recent MA thesis, Katrien Hoet has collected nineteen examples of coffins with inlaid eyes dating to the Middle Kingdom or late First Intermediate Period, and only the six mentioned in this article that date to the Old Kingdom: K. Hoet, *Een studie naar de patronen in de constructie van Egyptische lijkkasten uit het Middenrijk, met een case-study over ingelegde ogen op lijkkasten van het Oude en het Middenrijk* (MA thesis, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven; Leuven, 2008).

⁷ Egyptian Museum, Cairo, JE 51922 : A. Varille, *La tombe de Ni-Ankh-Pepi à Zâouyet El-Mayetīn* (MIFAO 70; Cairo, 1938), 27, pl. 18.

⁸ J. E. Richards, 'Time and Memory in Ancient Egyptian Cemeteries', *Expedition: Magazine of the University of Pennsylvania Museum* 44 (2002), 20 (late Old Kingdom or early First Intermediate Period).

two alabaster sclerae and one obsidian pupil were recovered in shaft G2001C in the tomb of Tjetu.⁹ The reason why Simpson attributes it to a coffin and not a statue is that the eye is not curved in its length.

Stylistically all the sets described above are very similar. The eyes are made up of six elements (or eight, if eyebrows are present) in a dark grey stone (greywacke, slate, serpentinite), two white sclerae (limestone or alabaster), and two black pupils (obsidian).¹⁰ The moustache stripe is always nearly straight, and is never combined together with the malar stripe.¹¹ Their flat backs are clear indications that they once fitted into a box coffin.

Inlaid *udjat*-eyes are certainly a rarity in late Old Kingdom box coffins, and most often the individual elements are found in disturbed contexts and no longer encased in the wooden panels where they were originally set. However, correctly recognising these objects as the constituent parts of *udjat*-eyes provides valuable information on the funerary equipment that once existed in a decayed or plundered burial. Stone objects survive better than wood, and they may well be the sole remainders of the decorative scheme once present on a coffin.

MARLEEN DE MEYER

**On the right of way in Ancient Egypt:
(entry to and exit from an estate: εἰσοδος καὶ ἔξοδος)**

Greek papyri recording transactions involving immovable property (buildings or land) often include a clause through which one of the two contracting parties is guaranteed *inter alia* the right to use a path over or adjacent to the property of his partner. The same phenomenon occurs in Demotic documents. An examination of the antecedents for this documentation reveals that the right of way was an important issue in the Pharaonic period, with disputes being decided in the law-courts.

In Greek deeds from the Graeco-Roman Period concerning rights over immovable property (buildings or land), there often occurs a clause containing the words εἰσοδος καὶ ἔξοδος. This is found in cases of inheritance, sale, partition of buildings, and so forth.¹ Through this clause, one of the two contracting parties was guaranteed, *inter alia*, the right to use a path over or adjacent to the property of the other party. In the case of houses, the path can lead, for example, through a gate or a door opening onto a public road or even through another building belonging to a third party, so that the party receiving this right could have free access to and from his own property.

A wide variety of instances are documented.² In the case of undivided property (*communio pro indiviso*), the owner of an ideal (undivided) share in the principal object is equally entitled to an ideal share in εἰσοδος καὶ ἔξοδος. In a real division of the property (*communio pro diviso*), each co-owner with a substantial share would enjoy the said right. When such a division took

⁹ W. K. Simpson, *Mastabas of the Western Cemetery*, I: *Sekhemka* (G 1029); *Tjetu I* (G 2001); *Iasen* (G 2196); *Pemmeru* (G 2197); *Hagy*, *Nefertjertet*, and *Herunefer* (G 2352/53); *Djaty*, *Tjetu II*, and *Nimesti* (G 2337X, 2343, 2366) (GMas 4; Boston, 1980), 14 (nr. 36-3-19), pl. 32d.

¹⁰ Lucas and Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Materials*⁴, 107-17 (Class II).

¹¹ The combination of malar stripe and moustache stripe is typical for First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom coffins from Asyūt: Hannig, *Zur Paläographie der Särge aus Assiut*, 41-4.

¹ R. Taubenschlag, 'Das Recht auf εἰσοδος und ἔξοδος in den Papyri', *AfP* 8 (1927), 25-33, = id., *Opera Minora* (Warsaw, 1959), II, 405-17.

² In several Demotic deeds the right to use a staircase is also found; cf. W. Spiegelberg, *Die demotischen Papyri* Loeb (Munich, 1931), 99-102 (P. Loeb 64 and 65); K.-T. Zauzich, *Die ägyptische Schreibertradition in Aufbau, Sprache und Schrift der demotischen Kaufverträge aus ptolemäischer Zeit* (ÄA 19; Wiesbaden, 1968), 19 (P. Louvre 2424), 24 (P. Louvre 2443), and 28 (P. Louvre 2431); E. Lüdeckens, *Demotische Urkunden aus Hawara: Umschrift, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (VOHD Suppl. 28; Stuttgart, 1998), 24, a staircase in addition to doors (P. Hawara III = P. Carlsberg 36). For a case relating to a share in a tomb, cf. *ibid.*, 79 (P. Hawara VIIa = P. Carlsberg 39a). The use of a path can be granted in order to fetch water for a garden share; cf. C. Andrews, 'The Sale of Part of a Pathyrite Vineyard (P. BM 10071)', in J. Baines, T. G. H. James, A. Leahy, and A. F. Shore (eds), *Pyramid Studies and other Essays Presented to I. E. S. Edwards* (EES OP 7; London, 1988), 195. For Coptic, see n. 19.